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ABSTRACT

A study examined the skills required of human resource development (HRD) specialists in western Texas. To gather data for the study, the researcher administered a survey instrument to 66 employers from the western Texas region who were identified as employing 200 or more persons. Of these individuals, 28 returned usable responses. Based on the completed survey instruments, 77 competencies were identified as being important to the job performance of HRD specialists in the area under investigation and 67 were identified as being not vitally important. The basic skills needed in designing and developing programs were related to the areas of critical thinking and evaluation. Listed among those skills needed most by trainers were good written and oral communications, data collection and analysis, planning and organization, problem-solving, and group process abilities. Responses to the survey instrument indicated that training in the companies located in the region under investigation generally proceeds from the top down and that it is most often self-contained within the individual company. Communications and conflict resolution training emerged as being especially important inasmuch as a substantial part of the trainers job appeared to be devoted to maintaining relationships. (MN)

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A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR TRAINING
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT SPECIALISTS

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine the skills required of Human Resource Development Specialists (HRDS) in the West Texas area. A survey instrument was developed from the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) study of professional skills needed on the job by trainers. The present instrument assessed the needs of a broad range of types of businesses. It asked the respondents to determine the required skills of the trainer.

The following are selected conclusions which were drawn. First, the findings can be used as a list of competencies for a HRDS training program in schools, colleges and departments of education. Second, the skills needed in designing and developing media programs would require a different focus. Third, the basic skills and abilities required of trainers are important generic goals to the present education curriculum, but focusing on such skills would require some reorientation. Fourth, a substantive part of the trainers job seems to be in the area of maintaining relationships. This would call for communications and conflict resolution training. And fifth, training in the area studied appeared to be "top down" in direction. This attitude must be considered in the development of training personnel, some attitude adjustment may be needed for teachers seeking roles as trainers.

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Needs Assessment for Training Human Resource Development
Specialists

Background of the Study

In the next twenty years the schools, colleges and departments of education (SCDEs) face both a crisis and an opportunity. The crisis arises from two sources: a potential decrease in resources and a narrow view of their mission; the opportunity exists because social and technological changes are opening new avenues for growth. The SCDEs have passed through a period of double digit inflation with little increase their resource base. Given their labor intensive situation, this alone has created a short-fall in resources. They are likely to face a continued decrease in enrollment given the present demand for teachers, the continued relative economic unattractiveness and public criticism of the teaching profession.

Although the SCDEs have traditionally seen their role as the training of teachers and specialists for public and private schools, this is a needless limitation on their capability. There is an expanding array of roles that SCDE's can play in educating people for future careers:

Consider this irony: while schools shrink, the major corporations of America invest billions of dollars in educational activities ranging from employee technical skill development to executive seminars, and that investment is growing. The big

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computer companies in Massachusetts, for example, employ a virtual army of educators who train employees, customers and each other. Digital Equipment Corporation estimates that its professional employees earn \$1.5 million over a lifetime, and that to derive a greater return on that investment, it must continuously upgrade skills. Digital employs 1,500 educators, or human resource development (HRD) specialists (Weaver, 1981).

Education is big business. Every economic activity is involved in training people to perform some task, know certain information, or express a specific set of attitudes. New technology, governmental regulation, and minority relations are causing industry, both foreign and domestic, to face new problems. Indeed if analysts like John Naisbett (1984) are correct, the entire nature of our society is changing from an industrial to an information society; from specialists to generalists who can adapt to change.

Faced with changing technology and governmental regulation, every business and industry, whether professional or nonprofessional; service or production oriented; must retrain its employees in vocational or nonvocational areas. To accomplish this, companies can hire their own training staffs, contract the training to sub-contractors (public or private), or contract the design of programs to other agencies (public or private) and train the employees themselves. All three of these alternatives are functioning at present. The SCDEs could be playing a

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role in all three of the alternatives available to business.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to assess the skills required of Human Resource Development Specialists. The problem of this study is to assess the skills required for the training of Human Resource Development Specialists in the West Texas area.

Related Research

Human Resource Development Specialists direct, design, prepare and implement programs into a variety of settings. The demand for such persons is evidenced by two entire journal issues devoted to the specialist's role: in education, Instructional Innovator, January, 1981; and in business, Performance and Instruction, January, 1981.

The Commission on Programs and Projects of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) indicated that almost one-half of today's graduates of schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) are finding positions in local, state, and federal agencies, in business and industry, in allied health professions, and in a number of other fields which involve

educational functions. For example, graduates of SCDEs are serving as materials specialists in hospitals, career centers, libraries and museums; as training and development specialists for business and industry; as consumer education specialists; and as educational programmers for television, radio, and newspapers. Now is the time for us to realize the strength of the generic competencies provided by SCDEs and to accept and claim the responsibility of preparing educational professionals for whatever setting (AACTE, 1980).

In 1977, the American society for Training and Development (ASTD) sponsored a survey of its members attempting to identify the functions trainers performed on their jobs. The study resulted in a list of competencies which has been used as a comparative base for a number of studies including the present one. The ASTD study will be discussed later.

In an attempt to assess the skills companys sought in the hiring of trainers and interns Deden-Parker (1981) surveyed 95 businesses in the San Fransisco area having training or media departments. The questionnaire included questions concerning interpersonal skills, instructional design competencies, media production activities, and items concerning typical modes of training. The results of her survey rated interpersonal skills, working independently,

problem-solving, working under pressure of time, planning, teamwork, testing and evaluation, writing procedures manuals, knowledge of company's business, and media reproduction as the top ten items. Sixteen other items dealt directly with teaching and instructional design activities.

Trimby (1982) conducted a survey using 300 randomly selected members of the Senior Trainers interest group of ASTD to determine the entry level competencies of team members and supervisors of training. This study is significant because it can be used to separate higher level and entry level skills, those of interest in the present study. Her study found that the highest ranked competencies for team members dealt with interpersonal communication type skills: listening effectively, attitude formation, adapting to differing situations, establishing communication and credibility with a group. Other high ranked competencies dealt with applying adult learning concepts, using equipment effectively, developing objectives, conducting group presentations, identifying appropriate presentation strategies, using evaluation data for program revision, identifying audience characteristics and describing prerequisite skills. The less important team member skills dealt with: preparing long and short term goals, locating outside consultants, designing research

studies, mediating differences among staff members, producing still photographs and multi-image displays, coordinating activities of the development unit, acquiring and managing facilities and equipment, supervising outside consultants, producing programs for computers, administering budgets, and establishing staffing patterns.

In a research project at Emporia State University Ishler and Ervay (1983) studied businesses and industries in Kansas through a survey instrument and individual interviews. Their findings indicated the most highly rated skills were: to counsel and direct employees, organize and work with groups, organize materials, use instructional techniques and instructional media. In the ranking of program elements the business representatives stressed psychology and behavioral modification more highly than private and public school educators.

Several important similarities are found in these studies, human relationship skills, planning and organizational skills, instructional design, and instructional techniques are listed as important competencies. Important differences also exist: Denden-Parker and Trimby took an instructional design program focus and underline the importance of the use of testing and evaluation. This is not validated in the Ishler

and Ervay study. Trimby introduces the concepts of team member and supervisor/manager skills. The Denden-Parker and Trimby study seem limited to a specific program focus, while the Ishler-Ervay study takes a general college perspective similar to the present study.

Procedures

Subjects. The Dunn and Bradstreet Million Dollar Directory was used to determine the names of businesses in the West Texas area which employ 200 or more persons. From this population, 66 were contacted by telephone and they indicated they would respond to the survey. Of this group 28 useful responses were received for a return of 42%.

Instrumentation. The needs assessment instrument was researcher-developed using the findings of the Professional Development Committee of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), a group representing trainers in education and business. This group formulated a set of nine activity areas and subheadings in which professional trainers are expected to engage (ASTD, 1979):

- Role 1: Specialists in Solving Learning Problems
 - I. Analyzing Needs and Evaluating Results
 - II. Designing and Developing Programs and Materials
 - III. Delivering Training and Development Programs and Materials
 - IV. Doing Research to Advance the Training Field

Role 2: Consultant
V. Advising and Counseling

Role 3: Administrator
VI. Managing Training Activities
VII. Maintaining Organization Relationships

Role 4: Personal and Professional Development
VIII. Developing Professional Skills and
Expertise
IX. Developing Basic Skills and Knowledge

The subheadings under the topics listed above were revised into competency type statements. Some items that were not useful to the purpose of the study were eliminated to shorten the form. The resulting instrument contained 77 items. The instrument was designed as a five point Likert-type scale containing an "Ideal" and a "Real" section on the form. The respondent was asked to complete both parts of the form which rated the needs statements on a scale from "essential" to "not important" on the "Ideal" part. The "Real" part of the form required the respondent to rate the same items in terms of the respondent's perception of how realistic these needs were in the work environment. This scale also ranged from "essential" to "not important."

The reason for using this model for data collection and analysis was to ensure that items identified as important were also important in what the respondent perceived as the real world. This would result in those

items which were actual needs.

The following demographic data was collected: type of business, number of employees, number of people on training staff, and training of present trainers. The businesses responding represented banking, construction, public utilities, petroleum processing and exploration, retail and wholesale sales, meat packing, cotton textiles and heavy equipment sales and service. The number of employees ranged from approximately 200 to 5,200. Most training staffs consisted of 1-2 people generally possessing undergraduate degrees.

Analysis. A descriptive analysis of the data was accomplished by placing the data in a 2 X 2 table of "Real" and "Ideal"; "important" and "unimportant." The resulting information was placed in a Quadrant Assessment Model adapted from a design developed by Pol (1975).

The Quadrant Assessment Model was based on four variables generated from the survey forms:

HIGH	HIGH
IDEAL	REAL
LOW	LOW
IDEAL	REAL

"High" was defined as those items with frequency scores equal to or greater than the mean and "low" was defined as those items with frequency scores less than the mean. Each item could be found somewhere on the high-low continuum on both forms--the Real and Ideal. When frequency scores for each item on both forms were examined, the items fell into one of four categories: high ideal-high real; high ideal-low real; low ideal-high real; low ideal-low real. Items listed on the high ideal-high real quadrant were considered training needs that would be ideal and realistic for the respondent's. Items listed in the high ideal-low real quadrant were considered ideal but not realistic in the training environment. Items listed in the low ideal-high real quadrant would not be ideal but were realistic expectations in the training environment. Finally, items listed in the low ideal-low real were considered to be items that were not ideal and were not realistic in the training environment.

Findings

The findings of this study will be listed under the headings similar to those used in the ASTD study. As the analysis requires, the findings will be discussed comparing the results to the studies discussed earlier. The first

category of findings are those identified as "High Ideal-High Real;" those needs that would be both ideal and realistic in the respondent's environment. The item numbers will be included to improve the readability of the data presented.

Training Needs Receiving High Ideal-High Real Ratings. The trainer required by industries in this area should be able to analyze needs and evaluate results through an analysis of: performance problems (1) and job requirements (2). From this information they should set program priorities (3) and assess performance (4) both before and after training as shown in Table 1. Essentially these findings are in line with previous studies.

Table 1
ITEMS RECEIVING HIGH IDEAL-HIGH REAL RATINGS

Training needs that would be ideal and realistic for present situation.		
HI-HR	#	Item
23-20	1.	Analyze performance problems to determine applicable training and development solutions.
24-18	3.	Identify training and development needs through analysis of job requirements.
22-17	4.	Evaluate training and development needs to set program priorities.
23-16	5.	Assess performance before and after training to measure training effects.
23-18	7.	Design programs to satisfy specific needs.
21-19	8.	Determine program content.
22-16	9.	Apply concepts of human development in designing training/development programs.
20-15	11.	Evaluate alternative instructional methods (e.g., video, role-play, demonstrations, etc.).
21-17	12.	Develop training materials (e.g., workbooks, exercises, cases).
19-15	15.	Determine program structure (length, number of participants, choice of techniques, etc.).
20-15	20.	Decide whether to use an existing program, purchase an external program, or create a new one to satisfy needs.
22-17	21.	Revise materials/programs based on evaluation feedback.

Table 1 (Continued)

ITEMS RECEIVING HIGH IDEAL-HIGH REAL RATINGS

19-16	23. Identify equipment and supplies required for training and development programs.
24-19	25. Conduct training programs.
23-19	28. Use a variety of teaching techniques such as role play, simulation, lecture, or discussion.
21-16	33. Assist managers in implementing on-the-job training.
19-18	38. Maintain records of participation in training.
21-15	41. Maintain information on training and development costs and benefits.
18-15	46. Obtain internal instructors and program resource people.
20-16	47. Evaluate internal instructors and program resource people.
20-15	48. Supervise the production of training and development materials.
19-16	49. Contact with outside vendors for programs and supplies.
22-18	51. Establish and maintain good working relationships with managers as clients.
20-15	52. Explain recommendations to gain acceptance for them.
16-14	53. Prepare and disseminate internal and external training and development program announcements.
18-15	54. Make formal management presentation of plans for training and development programs and projects.

Table 1 (Continued)

ITEMS RECEIVING HIGH IDEAL-HIGH REAL RATINGS

24-19	61. Learn about the organization.
25-21	62. Establish rapport and credibility with key personnel in the organization.
21-18	63. Understand how training relates to other activities in the personnel function.
22-17	68. Keep abreast of training and development concepts, theory, techniques, and approaches.
21-15	69. Attend seminars and conferences for personal development.
27-22	70. Have the ability to communicate effectively orally.
25-21	71. Have the ability to write effectively.
24-18	72. Have the ability to gather and analyze data.
26-23	73. Have the ability to plan and organize.
26-24	74. Have the ability to set priorities and use time efficiently.
26-23	75. Have the ability to solve problems.
24-18	76. Have the ability to use group process skills.
23-20	77. Have a knowledge of training resources.

Under the activity area of designing and developing training programs and materials trainers in the West Texas area should design programs (7), determine content (8), apply concepts of human development (9), evaluate alternative methods (11), develop materials (12), determine program structure (15), select or design programs (20), revise programs as needed (21), and identify equipment and supplies needed in the training process (23).

In the delivery of instruction the respondents indicated that trainers should: conduct training programs (25), and use a variety of techniques (28).

The only advising and counseling activity that was identified as "High Ideal-High Real" was assisting managers in implementing on-the-job training (33). This finding seems incongruent with the Ishler-Ervay study which showed counseling as a valuable component.

In the managing area the respondents selected as important competencies: maintaining training records (38), maintaining information on costs (41), obtaining internal instructors and resource people (46) and evaluating internal instructors and resource people (47), supervising the production of materials (48) and contacting outside vendors (51). The emphasis appears to be on the use of internal training personnel resources.

Maintaining organization relationships were selected as important needs. Training needs that would be ideal and realistic in the respondents' environments were: learning the organization (61), establishing rapport and credibility (62), and relating training to other activities (63). The importance of interpersonal relationships have been identified in all the other studies. This may be relevant in the interpretation of the "advising and counseling" skills area. Communication skills and conflict resolution are often considered as counseling content.

In the area of developing professional skills those items selected were: keeping abreast in training and development (68) and attending conferences and seminars (69).

The basic skills and abilities required of trainers were: effective oral (71) and written (72) communication, gathering and analyzing data (72), planning and organizing (73), setting priorities and using time effectively (74), solving problems (75), use group processes (76), and knowledge of training resources (77).

Training Needs Receiving High Ideal-Low Real Ratings. Those training needs that respondents listed as "High Ideal-Low Real," are needs that would be ideal but not realistic in the present environment as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
ITEMS RECEIVING HIGH IDEAL-LOW REAL RATINGS

HI-LR	#	Item
19-12	2.	Identify training and development needs through questionnaire surveys, and interviews and discussions.
19-12	10.	Apply adult learning theory and instructional principles in developing programs.
19-12	16.	Determine appropriate sequences of courses and programs (e.g., prerequisites, curricula).
15-8	17.	Develop criteria for selecting program participants.
20-10	18.	Develop exercises and tests for measurement of learning.
18-11	19.	Develop self-assessment tools (e.g., checklists, manuals, exercises).
20-14	22.	Identify and evaluate external training and development programs.
20-12	26.	Conduct on-the-job training.
19-12	27.	Train managers and supervisors how to train.
22-12	29.	Use coaching and counseling techniques.
16-7	30.	Counsel individuals on career development.
19-12	31.	Counsel employees on training and development matters.
21-13	32.	Counsel with managers and supervisors on training and development.
18-13	34.	Assist others in implementing training and development programs.

Table 2 (Continued)

ITEMS RECEIVING HIGH IDEAL-LOW REAL RATINGS

17-13	36. Evaluate external instructors and program resource people.
20-12	40. Prepare budgets and plans for training and development programs and projects.
18-12	42. Arrange for participation in external training and development programs.
18-12	44. Evaluate proposals from outside consultants.
17-12	50. Determine managerial/employee awareness of the availability of programs.
18-10	55. Write reports or manuals about training and development.
18-13	56. Write proposals for programs and projects.
16-13	59. Write memos and announcements about training and development.
16-10	64. Experiment with new training and development techniques.
16-10	65. Interpret data and statistics on training and development.
15-10	66. Present data and statistics.
21-13	67. Keep abreast of training and development activities in other organizations.

In the analyzing needs and evaluating results category of the ASTD study, the use of surveys and interviews (2), was apparently seen as a useful tool, but it was not used in the training environment of the respondents.

In designing and developing materials the use of human development theory (10), determining program sequences (16), developing participant selection criteria (17), developing assessment instruments (18) (19), and identifying and evaluating external programs (22) were seen as important things to do, but weren't actually used.

This finding seems paradoxical unless one considers the "work-a-day world's" view of theoretical considerations--the way things ought to be done. Although the application of human development principals is seen as important, the mention of theory seems tangential. Program sequences, selection criteria, and assessment instruments would likely be useful, ideally; but trainers are often given tasks to complete on the recommendations of senior administrators who have definite ideas as to needs and methods.

In the area of delivery of instruction conducting on-the-job training (26) and the training of managers and supervisors to train (27) recieved relatively high ideal-low real scores. This can be interpreted as meaning these procedures are simply not used widely in the area studied.

Similarly, the area of advising and counseling received realitively low scores: using coaching and counseling techniques (29), counseling on career development (30) and training matters (31), counseling managers and supervisors on training (32), and assisting others in implementing training programs (34) were apparently not seen as useful activities in the respondents' work environments. Counseling has been seen as a desireable competency in the Ishler and Ervay study. This is certainly not supported in this study. If counseling skills are interpreted to mean interrelationship or interpersonal communication skills, mentioned in both the Denden-Parker and Trimby studies, this can be substantiated in the maintaining relationships groupings discussed ealier.

It was mentioned in the previous section that most training personnel resources seemed to be found locally so

there would be little need for evaluating external instructors and resource people (36) or the use of external training programs (42). Also in the managing category preparing budgets and plans for training (40) seemed to fall outside the role of trainers.

The further insulation of the training area in the geographic region studied may be indicated by item 50 under maintaining relationships. Although the respondents felt "determining managerial/employee awareness of available programs" was ideally important, they felt it was not practical in their environments. Writing reports or manuals about training (55), memos and announcements (59), and proposals for programs or projects (56) may also indicate the "other directedness" indicated earlier.

Under the doing research category of the ASTD study, interpreting (65) and presenting (67) data and statistics received high ideal-low real ratings as did keeping abreast of training and development activities in other organizations (67).

Training Receiving Low Ideal-High Real Ratings

This category received no items. This can possibly be explained in two ways: the category is illogical or the items selected for the present study had already been identified as trainer roles.

Items Receiving Low Ideal-Low Real Ratings

Those training needs that would not be ideal and are not realistic in present environments are basically those perceived as unimportant in this geographic area. Item (6) in Table 3, administer achievement tests, aptitude tests, and questionnaires, were also considered unimportant in the Ishler-Ervay study. Somewhat of a surprise is found in the

Table 3

ITEMS RECEIVING LOW IDEAL-LOW REAL RATINGS

	Training needs that would not be ideal and are not realistic in present environment.	
LI-LR	#	Item
5-11	6.	Administer achievement tests, aptitude tests, and questionnaires.
10-13	13.	Prepare scripts for films, videotapes, etc.
10-3	14.	Develop programmed learning or computer-managed instructional materials.
13-7	24.	Prepare artwork, copy slides, and overhead projections.
13-7	35.	Obtain/hire external instructors and program resource people.
13-13	37.	Arrange program logistics (facilities, lodging, meals, etc.).
13-10	39.	Organize and staff the training and development function or department.
12-8	43.	Design data-collection procedures to maintain privacy or confidentiality.
9-5	57.	Write speeches about training and development.
8-3	58.	Write articles for periodicals and internal publications.
9-7	60.	Communicate with government and educational communities.

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low relative ratings of items (13) and (24) which involve the preparation of media materials. This raises some question in terms of elements of instructional design programs. These results differ from the Denden-Parker study which was developed to support an instructional design oriented program. This is also true of item (14) programmed learning or computer managed materials. As Trimby points out, this item may change as the technology is improved. Yet the high tech-high touch phenomena mentioned by Naisbett will bear watching.

Under the managing area, arranging logistics (37) is likely a secretarial staff task. Obtaining external instructors (35), organizing a training staff or department (39), and designing data collection procedures are likely management type activities in this geographic area. Given the introspective nature interpreted from the previous findings, writing speeches (57), preparing articles (58), and communicating outside the organization (60), would likely be perceived as unimportant in the training and development role.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine the skills required of Human Resource Development Specialists in the West Texas area. A survey instrument was developed from the

American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) study of professional skills needed on the job by trainers. The present instrument assessed the needs of a broad range of types of businesses. It asked the respondents to determine the ideal and real needs of the trainer. The following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The findings of this study, along with those mentioned can be used as a list of competencies for developing a program for Human Resource Development Specialist in SCDEs. Those competencies identified as high ideal-high real would be the most important competencies to include.

2. The skills needed in designing and developing programs require procedures of identification, analysis, selection, revision, and evaluation levels of thinking in addition to those of preparation. Programs designed to meet these needs would require a different focus than most media development programs.

3. The basic skills and abilities required of trainers were: effective oral, and written communication, gathering and analyzing data, planning and organizing, setting priorities and using time effectively, solving problems, and using group processes. These are clearly important goals for the present education curriculum. Focusing on such skills would require some reorientation in most SCDEs. The

result would create a stronger generic professional.

3. The delivery of instruction in training requires a variety of procedures apparently under the direction of one individual. This conclusion impacts in two ways. In the first instance, a program focusing on trainers should stress a variety of generic strategies and teaching methods. Second, one can assume from the findings that training programs in West Texas appear to be "one man" shows; somewhat similar to self-contained classrooms since the trainer is not involved in on-the-job training or the training of others to do training. It seems that training in team efforts would not be required.

4. A substantive part of the trainers job seems to be in the area of maintaining relationships. This would call for communications and conflict resolution training.

5. Training in the area studied appeared to be "top down" in terms of direction. This is not surprising, but it is an attitude that must be considered in the attitude development of training personnel. Teachers are often trained as self-initiators, so some attitude adjustment may be needed for persons seeking roles as trainers in business and industry.

6. Training appears to be self contained within the individual company. There is little evidence of reaching out except in the professional development activities of

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trainers.

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